Upgrading the state's wide area network (WAN) to newer technology and the benefits it brings are becoming a reality for state agencies and local governments. The new technology – multi-protocol label switching (MPLS) – offers greater reliability, speed and service options.

More than 800 circuits at state agencies throughout Georgia were connected to the state's new WAN by September 30, 2005. A total of 2,400 circuits will connect to the WAN by the time the MPLS project is completed in spring 2006.

Agencies already benefiting from MPLS include DHR's Office of Child Support Enforcement. Workers report increased productivity due to significantly faster response times for the state's child support system.
- The time required to register a case has been reduced from 30 to 14 minutes.
- The time required to establish an order has been reduced from 18 to 6 minutes.
- Searching for information about a case used to take 4 minutes; it now takes less than one minute.

The pricing for MPLS services enabled the Department of Corrections to provide its remote sites with at least a 400 percent increase in bandwidth – with most sites obtaining even greater increases – at no additional cost. The extra bandwidth solved the problem of e-mail attachments occasionally failing to reach intended recipients. It also improved the performance of essential applications.

Faster, more flexible and reliable

Through competitive bidding, GTA contracted with BellSouth in July 2004 to upgrade and manage the state's WAN. Outsourcing enables GTA to offer agencies newer and more reliable telecom services and to obtain better pricing. The six-year contract sets high performance standards, which BellSouth is contractually obligated to meet.

Besides greater speed and reliability, MPLS
- supports new technologies like Voice over IP (VoIP)
- lays a solid foundation for transmitting data, voice and video over a single network
- makes it easier to meet demands for better security
- provides greater technical support for teleworkers and wireless services
- allows network administrators to assign a different priority, known as Quality of Service, to different transmissions so certain ones can take precedence over others; for example, VoIP requires QoS to avoid audio breakups and popping or clicking sounds.

Economic development potential

Economic development is a secondary benefit of the MPLS project. When the state supports the development of a service like MPLS by a commercial provider such as BellSouth, the state is essentially an "anchor tenant" and the service becomes available more quickly to businesses throughout Georgia.

Smaller telecom companies and related service providers are also benefiting. BellSouth is subcontracting with them to complete "the last mile," especially in many smaller, rural communities.